



## THE IMPACT OF TEACHERS' ROLES ON CHILDREN'S ENGAGEMENT IN OUTDOOR PLAY IN KWALE COUNTY, KENYA

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### Abstract:

Outdoor play is part and parcel of child development. And because children spend most of their time interacting with their peers and teachers in Early Childhood Development Centres, it is the responsibility of educators to ensure all children enjoy learning through play. While many studies reveal the contribution of preschool teachers towards children outdoor play, the extent to which teachers' involvement in children's play contribute to either encouragement or discouragement of children to play is not yet clear. It is in the light of this that the study sought to determine how teachers' roles influence children's engagement in outdoor play in Kwale County, Kenya. The target population of this study was preschool teachers and head teachers in Kwale County. The study employed stratified and purposive sampling techniques to select preschools and head teachers respectively. Data were collected via questionnaire and observation checklists. Qualitative and quantitative data analysis procedures were used in which data revealed various roles of preschool teachers during children outdoor play activities. The results were presented using frequency distribution tables and bar graphs. The study established that teachers' involvement positively influences children's engagement in outdoor play. Based on the findings, the study recommended that teachers should seek to actively engage in children's outdoor activities as well as accompany them to the playgrounds during play time.

**Keywords:** outdoor play, teachers' involvement, engagement in outdoor play

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## 1. Introduction

Play is an essential element of children holistic development. It has a list of benefits that are necessary for children success in school and in their future life. For all the children in the world to get opportunities for play, United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) has been creating awareness on the importance of play in the life of a child (International Play Association, 2010). This international body has been viewing play as a fundamental right of children, making it possible for children living in wealthy families in cities as well as those that live in remote villages in developing countries to take part in play activities regardless of their socio-economic backgrounds.

Despite UNCRCs' emphasis on outdoor play for all children, the frequency at which children are taken out of the classrooms for outdoor play and the rate at which teachers involve themselves in children games has drastically dropped in some regions of the world. For example, some public schools and kindergartens in American have abolished play activities with the aim of creating quiet school environment for academic learning (Stipek, 2006). These schools have also set a strict system that is teacher-centred, mainly to hone numeracy and literacy skills of the learners at the expense of play time (Hirsh-Pasek, Golinkoff, & Eyer, 2004). This situation has in turn hampered teachers' willingness to engage their pre-schoolers into outdoor play activities.

Frost (2010) asserts that teachers should play together with their learners to help them make the right decisions, become creative and boost their understanding of the world around. However, findings of some international studies on the roles of teachers in children outdoor play revealed a list of teachers' responsibilities in the event of children outdoor play (Yang, 2013; Flee, 2015; Davies, 1997). These studies described the roles of preschool teachers as solving children disputes, planning games, coaching, supervising, providing play materials and formulating the rules to be followed by the players.

Researchers such as (Davies, 1997) have different perception on the impact of teachers' involvement in children's outdoor play. Studies shows that when teachers excessively involve themselves in children play, they disrupt the flow of play, inhibit children ability of self-expression and limit children's freedom of interacting with their peers (Johnson, Christie, & Wardle, 2005). On the other hand, Vygotsky maintains that teachers' participation in children games vital as it offers an excellent opportunity for the children to be guided and directed in play activities that they could not perform on their own (Seefeldt & Barbour, 1998).

Teachers are among the key caregivers of preschool age children as they spend more time with children than parents. This implied that they determine when to take children out for outdoor play and how much time children should spend in the playgrounds. According to a study by Okoruwa (2017), half of teachers in Nigeria believed that co-playing with children is crucial while others stated that they would rather use children play time for other school duties rather than playing together with them. The fact that 50 per cent of teachers denied to participate in children play is a reasonable indication that some pre-schoolers take part in outdoors without the help or

guidance of a teacher/adult.

In Kenya, play is an integral part of Competency Based Curriculum (CBC) particularly in early years education (pre-primary education). The curriculum stresses the need for teachers to expose young learners into different forms of psychomotor activities on a daily basis in order to help them control and coordinate their body parts (KICD, 2017). Recent studies in Kenya regarding outdoor play have focused on how children outdoor play influence their development of either social, emotional, physical and language skills (Akoth, 2016; Ochanda, 2015). While these studies reveal teachers' roles during children outdoor play, they failed to establish the extent to which these roles promote or hinder children participation in outdoor play.

To fill the gap in the related literature reviewed, it was necessary to establish ways in which teachers involve themselves in children outdoor play in Kwale County. Furthermore, there was need to determine whether the involvement of preschool teachers in outdoor play has a positive or negative impact on children participation in play.

## **2. Purpose of the Study**

This study sought to investigate the roles of preschool teachers during children engagement in outdoor play. ECDE teachers perform different duties during children's outdoor play session, therefore, the study as well sought to examine the impact of teacher involvement in preschool children outdoor play activities in Kwale County, Kenya.

## **3. Research Questions**

- 1) What are the roles of preschool teachers during children's outdoor play sessions in Kwale County?
- 2) How does teacher involvement determine children participation in outdoor play in Kwale County?

## **4. Material and Methods**

This study used descriptive survey design which means that the research gathered information about teacher's ideas, attitudes and perspectives on how teacher involvement influences the frequency at which preschool children participate in outdoor play. The population of this study comprised of preschool teachers and head teachers in Kwale County, Kenya.

The study targeted about 350 teachers from which a sample 35 preschool teachers and 24 head teachers were selected via stratified random and purposive sampling techniques respectively.

Questionnaire and observation checklists were used to collect both qualitative and quantitative data. The questionnaire was administered to the selected teachers and head teachers while the observation checklist was used to record researchers' observations about teachers' roles during outdoor play. The clarity of these two data collection tools was improved via face validity. For further validation, the researcher designed the tools while consulting an expert at Kenyatta University. To ensure reliability of instruments, the researcher employed test-retest procedure in which the results of the tests were correlated using Pearson Product Moment Correlation formula and a reliability coefficient of 0.75 was obtained.

Data were collected within two weeks in 24 schools. They were then analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Chi-square test was employed to test the hypotheses. The results were presented in the form of frequency distribution tables, bar graphs and pie charts. In the entire process of this study, ethical considerations were strictly followed. This included keeping participants data confidential as well as requesting teachers to take part in the study.

## 5. Results and Discussion

### 5.1 Demographic Information of the Respondents

Preschool teachers and head teachers were the participants of this study and their demographic information was gathered and analysed as follows:

**Table 1:** Gender of Preschool Teachers and Head Teachers

Head Teachers	Percent (%)	Preschool Teachers	Percent (%)
Male	63	Male	26
Female	37	Female	74
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>

Twenty-four head teachers participated in this study. Table 1 shows that 63% of sampled head teachers who participated in this study were male while the female was 37%. This data implies that there were more male head teachers in Kwale County than female head teachers. These findings corroborate with a report from England by (HM Government, 2007) which stated that despite low proportion of male teachers in nursery and primary school, male teachers are still likely to get promoted to headship.

Table 1 also indicates that 74% of preschool teachers who participated in this study were females while males were 26%. Therefore, these findings show that there were more female preschool teachers in Kwale County than male. This data concurs with findings of global research such as a survey report from Sweden and Turkey which found that there is a higher number of nursery teachers than male (Hedlin & Aberg, 2013). Participants were also asked to state their professional qualifications and Table 2 below summarise their response.

**Table 2:** Professional Qualifications of Preschool Teachers and Head Teachers

Head Teachers		Preschool Teachers	
Qualification	Percent (%)	Qualification	Percent (%)
KCPE/CPE	0	KCPE/CPE	5.7
ECD Certificate	8.3	ECD Certificate	48.6
Diploma in ECD	58.3	Diploma in ECD	37.1
BED (ECE)	29.2	BED (ECE)	5.7
MED (ECE)	0	MED (ECE)	0
Others	4.2	Others	2.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>

As shown in Table 2, the most substantial proportion of sampled head teachers had Diploma in Early Childhood Development and Education (58.3%), followed by (29.2%) of head teachers who had bachelor degree from the university. Those with Certificate in Early Childhood Development and Education were (8.3%) while about (4%) of the sampled head teachers had other professional qualification. It was revealed that no head teacher in the sampled population who had a master degree in Early Childhood Education as well as KCPE/CPE.

The result of this finding implied that professional and qualified head teachers headed most of the preschools in Kwale County, Kenya. It can be argued that head teachers with a higher level of qualification can formulate school policies that provide every child with an excellent opportunity to participate in outdoor play.

Table 2 also shows that the largest number of sampled teachers (48.6%) had Kenya Certificate of Early Childhood and Development Education, followed by those with Diploma of Early Childhood and Development Education (37.1%). Those with a Bachelor Degree in Early Childhood Education and those with KCPE/CPE each made up about (5.7%) of the sampled teachers, while those with other professional qualifications were (2.9%).

This finding corroborates with findings from other Counties in Kenya such as Kiambu (Wangui, 2013) and Kilifi (Ntondwe, 2017) which established that the most significant proportion of preschool teachers have been trained up to certificate level. This might have been contributed by the efforts of [County Government of offering bursaries](#) to student pursuing certificates and diplomas in early childhood studies (Kombe, 2018).

## 5.2 Impact of Teachers' Involvement in Children Outdoor Play

**Research Question 1:** What are the roles of preschool teachers during children's outdoor play sessions in Kwale County?

**Table 3:** Teachers Views on their Roles during Children's Outdoor Play

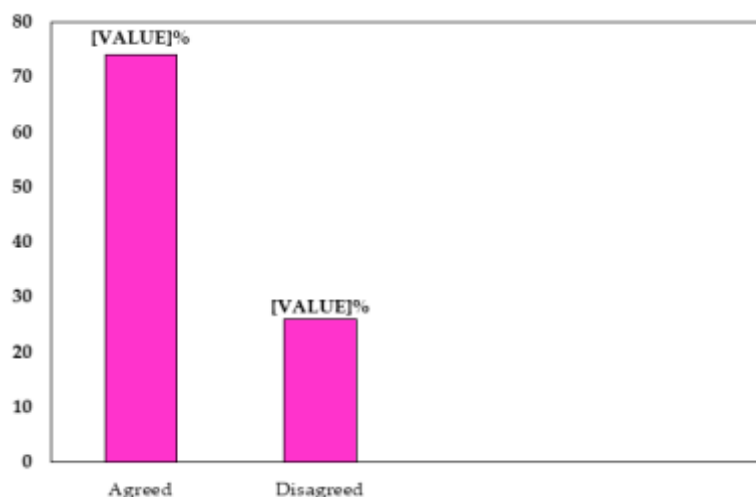
Head Teachers Views	F	%	Preschool Teachers Views	F	%
Prevent injuries and accidents	10	41.7	Supervision	10	28.8
Supervise children	21	87.5	Provision of resources	12	34.3
Settle disputes among players	14	58.3	Making rules	6	17.1
Provide play materials	18	75	Coaching and training	5	14.3
Others	5	20.8	Others	2	5.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 3 above shows that teachers and head teachers had similar views on the duties of preschool teachers during outdoor play. From the findings, it is clear that majority of sampled teachers and headteachers believed that the major roles of preschool teachers during children outdoor play are to: (i) supervise children as they play, (ii) make rules of the game, (iii) provide necessary play materials, and (iv) settle disagreements among players. This finding converges with the assertion of (Fleer, 2015) that teachers has to act as facilitators, co-players, planners, supporters, organisers as well as mediators during children play time.

It was observed that some teachers did not accompany their pre-schoolers to the play fields instead they were left in the classroom to take breakfast, prepare for the next lesson or even mark books. In some sampled schools, teachers were seen watching their children from a far distance as they play. This implied that they perceived outdoor activities less important. The researcher also observed that some teachers were playing with their children while others officiated the game.

**Research Question 2:** How does teacher involvement determine children participation in outdoor play in Kwale County?

Children play behaviours are not disrupted by teacher involvement unless the teacher deliberately interferes with their games (Rajni, Sarika, & Anita, 2005). For this reason, the study went ahead to examine how teacher involvement influence the play behaviours of preschool children.



**Figure 1:** Teachers Responses on Effect of Adult Presence on Children Play

Figure 1 shows that a large proportion of sampled teachers (74%) agreed that the presence of a teacher during children play sessions lessens their interest to play while (26%) reported that teacher's presence when children are playing has no impact on their play. This finding confirms the reports of scholars such as (Pellegrini, 1984) and (Christie & Wardle, 1992) who asserted that children need not to be allowed to play alone and with peers as teacher presence inhibit children dramatic play, their social interaction and their willingness to negotiate in the event of conflicts.

The study hypothesised that teachers' involvement had a significant influence on preschool children's engagement in outdoor play in Kwale County, Kenya. Teachers' involvement in play was categorised into (Involved and Not Involved) while engagement in outdoor play was categorised into (Engaged or Not Engaged). To establish the relationship between teachers' involvement in play and preschool engagement in outdoor play, a cross-tabulation between the two variables was done.

**Table 4:** Relationship between Teachers' Involvement and  
Children's Participation in Outdoor Play

Preschool Teachers Responses		Engagement in Outdoor Play		
		Engaged	Not Engaged	Total
Involved	<b>Count</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>27</b>
	% within do you involve yourself in children play?	100%	0%	100.0%
	% of total	77.1%	0%	77.1%
Not Involved	<b>Count</b>	<b>02</b>	<b>06</b>	<b>08</b>
	% within do you involve yourself in children play?	82.3%	17.7%	100.0%
	% of total	5.71%	17.7%	23.4%
Total	<b>Count</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>06</b>	<b>35</b>
	% within do you involve yourself in children play?	82.3%	17.7%	100.0%
	% of total	82.3%	17.7%	100.0%

As shown in Table 4, for 100% involvement in outdoor play activities by teachers, there was (77.1%) engagement in outdoor games by preschool children. On the other hand, for (100%) non-involvement in outdoor play activities by the preschool teachers, the study registered (23.4%) engagement of children in outdoor games. This statistical data confirms that there was a correlation between teachers' involvement in outdoor play activities. The implication of this finding is that the more teachers participate in children games, the more children become interested to play. This finding corroborates with prior study done by (Waithaka, 2010) which revealed that children become more enthusiastic when playing with their teachers.

To establish the statistical significance of the above finding, chi-square test was carried out to establish if there was a relationship between the two categorical variables as it was hypothesised or it was just occurred by chance. The results are shown in Table 5 below.

**Table 5:** Chi-Square Results for Relationship between  
Teachers' Involvement and Children's Engagement in Outdoor Play

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson chi-square	15.3(a)	2	.026
Likelihood ratio	20.01	2	.035
Linear-by-linear association	.105	1	.083
N of valid classes	35		

The Pearson chi-square value was 15.3 and p value of 0.026 which reveals that there was a statistically significant association between teachers' involvement and children's engagement in outdoor play. This is due to the fact that the p value of 0.026 was below the 0.05 alpha value for the results to have statistical significance.

This finding supports the results of (Fleer, 2015) that teachers involve themselves in children outdoor play via different ways, and their contributions and presence greatly boost children morale to play. In this regard, the hypothesis that stated: '*teachers' involvement in outdoor play has a significant influence on preschool children's engagement in outdoor play in Kwale County, Kenya*' was accepted.

## 6. Conclusions

From the study findings, it can be concluded that teachers play different roles when they take children to the play fields. Though provision of play materials was the primary thing teachers did to ensure children have good time in the play grounds, it was observed that some teachers not only co-played with their children but also acted as mediators when the players disagreed. Furthermore, the study revealed that teachers' contribution towards children outdoor play is a driving force that pushes children to participate in a variety of games.

## 7. Recommendations

For children to be safe when playing with their peers, teachers should carefully watch them and provide them with proper guidance. The school management should provide a variety of play resources and encourage teachers to accompany children in the play fields during psychomotor activity lessons and free play episodes such as break time. To encourage children to play, teachers should praise those that play, encourage children to play as a team, and invent more games in order to keep all children engaged.



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